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## ABSTRACT

Sports articles appearing in three New York City newspapers in Jackie Robinson's first season as a major league baseball player were examined to determine if there was biased reporting based on racial prejudice. The sports pages of the New York "Times," the "Herald Tribune," and the "Daily News" for 44 days in 1947 were studied. The following items were tabulated for each story: (1) the number of times Robinson was identified as black and whether the identifying word was used as a noun or an adjective, (2) the number of incidents reported that had racial connotations, and (3) the number of racial stereotypical words used in reference to Robinson (such as "boy"). Figures were also noted of the number of game stories in which Robinson's name did not appear, even though he had played in the games, and what his batting average was in those games. Photographs were also examined to see how many times he appeared in pictures showing Brooklyn Dodger players. The findings revealed that while there were numerous instances of subtle bias in all three newspapers, the sports writers generally provided fair coverage of Jackie Robinson in his first major league season. (FL)

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NEW YORK NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF JACKIE ROBINSON  
IN HIS FIRST MAJOR LEAGUE SEASON

by

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When Jackie Robinson was signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers for the 1947 season, he became the first black to play in the major leagues in modern times.<sup>1</sup> He had impressive credentials. In 1946 with Brooklyn's Montreal farm team, he led the International League in batting at .349, was the league's best fielding second baseman and stole 40 bases.<sup>2</sup>

Most baseball owners still did not want him in the major leagues, however, because of his race. That was no secret.

In 1945, Leland S. McPhail, president of the New York Yankees, said that blacks would have to demonstrate that they had "ability, character and aptitude" before they could play in the majors. He added that he doubted they possessed white players' coordination and competitiveness.<sup>3</sup>

A year later, during a Congressional subcommittee investigation of baseball, "the owners defended their racist policy (of only signing white players) on three counts: 1) there were too few good black players, 2) the separate Negro major leagues would be hurt by integration, and, 3) outside agitators were conspiring to cripple major league baseball by branding it racist."<sup>4</sup>

Some sportswriters also downgraded black baseball players. Joe Williams, a New York sports editor, wrote that blacks "have been kept out of big league ball because they are, as a race, very poor ball players. The demands of the (Negro) often bulk larger than his capabilities."<sup>5</sup>

Jimmy Powers of the New York Daily News was equally blunt.

If the Negro player couldn't muscle into the major league line-ups when forty-three-year-old outfielders patrolled the grass for pennant winners and one-armed men and callow 4F's were stumbling around (in World War II), he won't make it in 1946 when the rosters will be bursting with returned headliners, all competent big leaguers of proven ability.<sup>6</sup>

Robinson felt derogatory comments were rare, however.

The sportswriters, more than any other group or individual, are responsible for the entry of Negro players into organized baseball. For years and years they have fought for the abolishment of the color line. Never have they let baseball's officialdom forget that as long as they barred any race, creed, or color from the diamond, baseball could not be called the American sport....

Sportswriters from coast to coast kept hammering away at the seemingly impregnable wall. Public support grew stronger and stronger. At last cracks began to appear, and then the barrier was smashed. It happened to be the first player to benefit.<sup>7</sup>

Since Robinson's comment came in 1948 on the verge of stardom, he may have been hesitant to criticize the press because he felt he might hurt his career. Then, too, he would not have forgotten that Branch Rickey chose him (instead of another black) because he fit a set of criteria drawn up by the Dodgers' president--one of which was a player who would "elicit good press and public reaction."<sup>8</sup>

Some sportswriters championed the black's cause in baseball. Gordon Macker of the Los Angeles Daily News wrote in World War II that if a black "is good enough to stop a bullet in France, he's good enough to stop a line drive" in a major league park.<sup>9</sup>

The famed Damon Runyan also addressed the issue:

If baseball belonged to all the people and the people had a vote in its conduct, Negroes would be permitted to play in organized baseball if they could make good by the same standards set for whites. . . .I do not see why baseball should be more exclusive than track and field and boxing and college football when it comes to the participation of Negroes.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, Al Laney of the New York Herald Tribune interviewed Robinson and came away with this impression: "If there are baseball players who will refuse to play with or against this personable, intelligent, and sensitive man, they must indeed be blinded by prejudice."<sup>11</sup>

By the 1952-53 seasons, Robinson was an established star and blacks were no longer rare in the major leagues. Yet, Roger Kahn, in his highly-acclaimed book, The Boys of Summer, recalls twice having problems with his

editors, while covering the Dodgers for the New York Herald Tribune, when he wrote stories about racial incidents involving Robinson. The paper refused to run the first article, wiring him: "Herald Tribune will not be a sounding board for Jackie Robinson. Write baseball, not race relations. Story killed."<sup>12</sup>

Thus, on the second occasion, he wondered how he could "slip the story into a newspaper which was made nervous by race."

If I wrote a racial story, would the Tribune print it? . . . Then, with great intensity and haste, I composed a cryptogram of a story. I had to mask my principal point from Tribune segregationists, who. . . had the power to censor. But I had to state my point clearly enough for sensitive readers to understand it. Eventually, the Tribune published the cryptogram without a single stroke of editing.<sup>13</sup>

Kahn's recollections raise a question. If a major New York paper was prejudiced and/or biased in its coverage after Robinson was a star, what was the coverage like in his first major league season? Among the conflicting influences on sportswriters were the baseball owners' stated dislike of blacks, articles by their peers both for and against blacks playing in the major leagues and the fact that every writer covering professional baseball for the major New York papers was white.<sup>14</sup> This paper will examine articles in three New York newspapers (Times, Herald Tribune and Daily News) in Robinson's first season in an attempt to determine if there was biased reporting based on racial prejudice. The papers were selected because they represented a range of types of sportswriting -- the Times was conservative, the Herald Tribune much more colorful and the Daily News not only colorful but noted for being slightly racist.

#### Methodology

The sports pages from 44 days in 1947 were examined. The day included: the week before the baseball season began; the first and last weeks of the season; and one day, immediately following a game, chosen randomly from each week between the season's first and last weeks.

Stories were classified as news-features (originally, these were separate categories but they were combined because the three papers seldom ran features) or columns. The following items were tabulated for each story: number of times Robinson was identified as a black and whether the identifying word was used as a noun or as an adjective; number of incidents reported that had racial connotations; and number of racial stereotypes (such as the word "boy") used in reference to Robinson. Figures also were tabulated for the number of game stories in which Robinson's name did not appear (although he had played) and what his batting average was in those games. In addition, photographs were examined to see how many times Robinson appeared in pictures showing Brooklyn players.

These items were chosen as measurements of bias, based on racial prejudice, for specific reasons. Robinson complained after he was out of baseball about the number of times a racial identifying term was used as an adjective, and Roy E. Carter, in a 1957 segregation study in Journalism Quarterly, found that bias was shown by whether "Negro" was used as a noun or as an adjective.<sup>15</sup> The other items were measured because it was hypothesized that biased reporting would result in: rarely mentioning incidents with racial connotations so that readers wouldn't sympathize with Robinson; constant usage of racial stereotypes because this would be a subtle way of keeping blacks in their place; and non-use of Robinson's name in game stories and photographs, thus suggesting that he wasn't having an outstanding season.

Finally, the stories and photographs in the three newspapers were compared, using the raw numbers and percentages.

Several rules were followed in gathering the data:

1. Agate box scores were not included in determining story lengths and number of words. Since these were factual statistics, they offered no possibility for prejudiced reporting.

2. Headlines also were not included in length and word counts. However, if the word "Negro" appeared in a headline, it was included in the count of terms identifying Robinson's race.

3. Any race-identifying terms were counted only if they specifically referred to Robinson. For example, a pitcher added to the Brooklyn squad at the end of the season was identified as a "Negro" by all three papers, but this is not reflected in the study's findings.

4. Unless otherwise indicated, the number of stories shown in the findings are only those in which Robinson's name appeared.

5. While only one edition of the Times and Herald Tribune appeared on microfilm, there were numerous editions from each day of the Daily News. In the latter, stories were measured in the edition in which they ran the longest.

### Findings

#### Use of Robinson's name in game coverage

In 29 days' coverage of regular season games from April through September, the Daily News did not mention Robinson in only 21 percent of its stories. That was a lower percentage than in the other two papers. The Times did not refer to him in 24 percent of its stories, and the Herald Tribune did not mention him in 34 percent of its accounts. On all three papers, his batting average for the games in which he wasn't mentioned was far below his season-ending average of .297.<sup>16</sup> (See Table 1)

The statistics are somewhat misleading on the number of games in which he played, but his name did not appear in the stories. Most of these games were in the latter half of the season. The Times first left his name out June 5, after he had been 0-3 at the plate in a game with the Pittsburgh Pirates,<sup>17</sup> but the other six stories were in the last two months of the season. The Herald Tribune failed to mention him even earlier, on May 28 following an 0-4 performance in batting against the New York Giants,<sup>18</sup> and eight of the 10

TABLE 1

|                                | Games surveyed<br>in which<br>Robinson played | Games in which<br>Robinson played<br>but was not put<br>into story | Robinson's hits<br>(and average)<br>in games where<br>he wasn't mentioned |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <u>New York Times</u>          | 29                                            | 7                                                                  | 1-26 (.038)                                                               |
| <u>New York Daily News</u>     | 29                                            | 6                                                                  | 1-24 (.042)                                                               |
| <u>New York Herald Tribune</u> | 29                                            | 10                                                                 | 3-38 (.079)                                                               |

stories in which he didn't appear were in the last half of the season. The Daily News also left his name out for the first time on May 28,<sup>19</sup> and four of the six articles were in the season's final two months.

#### Identification of Robinson as a Black

In 144 stories (both news-features and columns) surveyed on the three papers, there were 74 terms used that identified Robinson as a black. (See Table 2) Twenty-five of the terms appeared in 19 of the Times' 46 stories (meaning that 41 percent of the paper's stories had at least one of the terms), 26 terms were used in 22 of the Daily News' 57 articles (39 percent of the stories) and 23 terms showed up in 15 of the Herald Tribune's 41 stories (37 percent of the articles).

The Times used 21 of the terms in 22 stories through May 10 and spread the final four terms over the remaining 24 stories. The same pattern existed in the Herald Tribune. Twenty-one terms appeared in 20 articles by May 10, and the other two terms were in the last 21 stories. The Daily News differed significantly, however, using 17 terms in 26 stories through May 10 and then putting nine more in 31 stories after that. This means that after May 10 the Daily News identified Robinson as a black  $4\frac{1}{2}$  times as often as the Herald Tribune and more than twice as much as the Times.

Two newspapers used a much higher percentage of race-identifying terms

TABLE 2: RACE-IDENTIFYING TERMS

|               | No. of stories surveyed |            |             | Pct. of stories that identified Robinson's race |            |             | No. of race identifying terms |            |             | Pct. of times race terms used as nouns |            |             | Pct. of times race terms used as adjectives |            |             |
|---------------|-------------------------|------------|-------------|-------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------|-------------------------------|------------|-------------|----------------------------------------|------------|-------------|---------------------------------------------|------------|-------------|
|               | <u>TIMES</u>            | <u>HT*</u> | <u>DN**</u> | <u>TIMES</u>                                    | <u>HT*</u> | <u>DN**</u> | <u>TIMES</u>                  | <u>HT*</u> | <u>DN**</u> | <u>TIMES</u>                           | <u>HT*</u> | <u>DN**</u> | <u>TIMES</u>                                | <u>HT*</u> | <u>DN**</u> |
| News-Features | 42                      | 34         | 45          | .381                                            | .294       | .422        | 21                            | 14         | 23          | .381                                   | .286       | .261        | .619                                        | .714       | .739        |
| Columns       | 4                       | 7          | 12          | .750                                            | .714       | .250        | 4                             | 9          | 3           | 1.000                                  | .556       | 1.000       | .000                                        | .444       | .000        |
| All Stories   | 46                      | 41         | 57          | .413                                            | .366       | .386        | 25                            | 23         | 26          | .480                                   | .391       | .346        | .520                                        | .609       | .654        |

\* Herald Tribune

\*\* Daily News

in their columns than in their news and feature articles. The Herald Tribune used nine terms in seven columns (1.3 per story) while the Times had four in four columns. However, in news and feature stories, the Herald Tribune only had 14 in 34 stories (41 percent of the articles) and the Times used 21 in 42 articles (50 percent).

The statistics were the reverse for the Daily News. While there were 23 race-identifying terms in 45 news and feature stories (51 percent), there were only three terms in 12 columns (.25 per story).

All three papers used race-identifying terms more often as an adjective than as a noun. Thirteen of the 25 terms in the Times (52 percent) were adjectives, which compared with 14 of the Herald Tribune's 23 terms (61 percent) and 17 of the Daily News' 26 terms (65 percent).

On the Times, "Negro star" was the most common adjectival use, showing up nine times. Used once were: "Negro speedster," "Negro first baseman," "Negro player" and "Negro ballplayer." Both "Negro infielder" and "Negro first baseman" were used five times by the Herald Tribune. Four other terms were used once: "Negro player," "Negro ballplayer," "dark and anxious young man" and "Negro's work." In the Daily News, like the Times, "Negro star" was the most common, showing up on seven occasions. Other terms used were: "Negro first baseman" (four times), "Negro infielder" (three), "Negro player" (two) and "Negro newcomer" (one).

#### Incidents reported with racial connotations

The three papers reported 46 incidents in 144 stories. The Daily News was easily the leader, using almost 2½ times more than the Times and about three times more than the Herald Tribune. The 26 incidents reported by the Daily News appeared in 18 of the paper's 57 stories (meaning that 32 percent of the stories cited an incident). In the Times, 11 incidents appeared in seven of the 46 stories (15 percent of the articles) while the Herald Tribune's

TABLE 3: RACIAL INCIDENTS

|               | No. of stories surveyed |            |             | Pct. of stories that reported racial incidents |            |             | No. of racial incidents reported |            |             | Pct. of incidents related to harassment of Robinson by opposing players |            |             |
|---------------|-------------------------|------------|-------------|------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------|----------------------------------|------------|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------|
|               | <u>TIMES</u>            | <u>HT*</u> | <u>DN**</u> | <u>TIMES</u>                                   | <u>HT*</u> | <u>DN**</u> | <u>TIMES</u>                     | <u>HT*</u> | <u>DN**</u> | <u>TIMES</u>                                                            | <u>HT*</u> | <u>DN**</u> |
| News-Features | 42                      | 34         | 45          | .143                                           | .088       | .289        | 10                               | 4          | 19          | .100                                                                    | .000       | .105        |
| Columns       | 4                       | 7          | 12          | .250                                           | .529       | .417        | 1                                | 5          | 7           | .000                                                                    | .000       | .143        |
| All Stories   | 46                      | 41         | 57          | .152                                           | .146       | .316        | 11                               | 9          | 26          | .091                                                                    | .000       | .115        |

\* Herald Tribune

\*\* Daily News

nine incidents showed up in six of the paper's 41 articles (also 15 percent).  
(See Table 3)

The newspapers differed markedly in the types of stories that reported the incidents. In the Times, 10 of the 11 incidents appeared in news and feature stories (91 percent). The Daily News, however, used 19 of 26 items in news and feature accounts (73 percent) while the Herald Tribune had the majority of its incidents, five of the nine, in columns (44 percent in news and features).

As in the previous category, the majority of the incidents were reported by May 10. By that date, the Herald Tribune had used eight incidents (89 percent) in 20 stories while the final 21 stories contained only one incident. The Times noted eight incidents (73 percent) in the 22 stories through May 10 but only had three in the 24 articles surveyed after that. In the Daily News, 18 incidents (69 percent) appeared in 26 stories through May 10 and the other eight were in 31 stories after that.

On the Times and Herald Tribune, the incidents reported fell into five broad categories. The categories and number in each group on the Times were: comments about Robinson by his teammates and incidents where they accepted or rejected him (4); fan appreciation of Robinson despite his race (3); proposed strike against Robinson by the St. Louis Cardinals (2); written threats against Robinson (1); and harassment of Robinson during games by opposing players (1).

On the Herald Tribune, the categories and numbers were: Cardinals' proposed strike against Robinson (2); fan appreciation of Robinson (2); comments of teammates and incidents involving them (2); team owners wanting to keep blacks out of baseball (2); and Robinson commenting before the season on his chances of making the Dodgers (1).

The incidents in the Daily News were in six categories. They were: miscellaneous incidents and questions raised about Robinson's baseball experiences (8); incidents involving teammates and the Dodger management (8); fan appreciation of Robinson (5); harassment of Robinson during games by opposing players (3); proposed strike (1); and written threats (1).

#### Racial stereotypes used in reference to Robinson

In 144 stories, there were only three times that stereotypes were applied to Robinson. The Daily News referred to him once as a "boy"<sup>20</sup> and the Times twice noted he was "the first of his race to make the grade."<sup>21</sup> While the latter statement is accurate, since he was the first in modern times to play in the major leagues, the words "make the grade" were judged to be derogatory, implying that blacks as a race did not have the ability to do as well in baseball as white players.

#### Use of Robinson in photographs showing Brooklyn players

In photographs of Dodger players, Robinson appeared in a higher percentage of the pictures in the Times than in the other two newspapers. He was in nine of the Times' 25 pictures showing the players, which was 36 percent of the photographs. The Daily News had him in 39 of 135 pictures (29 percent) and the Herald Tribune showed him in nine of 36 pictures (25 percent).

In the Times and Herald Tribune, he appeared in pictures only at the beginning and end of the season. Five of the Times' photographs and six in the Herald Tribune appeared in April while the rest were in September. The Daily News deviated somewhat from this pattern. Twenty-four of its photographs with Robinson were in April and eight were in September. The other seven appeared in May (3), July (2) and August (2).

In cutlines, the Times and the Daily News called him a "Negro" once each and the Herald Tribune did it three times although his skin color was obvious in all five photographs. Both the Times and Herald Tribune mentioned

his race on April 11 when each ran the same Associated Press picture showing him shaking hands with his former manager at Montreal.<sup>22</sup> The Daily News did it the same day on one of its own photographs of Robinson entering the Dodger locker room.<sup>23</sup> On the following day, the Herald Tribune called him a "Negro player" in a cutline<sup>24</sup> and finally, on Sept. 23, it noted in a caption that he was "the first Negro eligible to play in a World Series."<sup>25</sup>

### Conclusions

The findings strongly suggest that May 10 was a critical point in the newspaper coverage of Robinson.

Until that date, all three papers avidly supported his entry into the major leagues. But following May 10, both the Times and Herald Tribune altered their coverage of Robinson, virtually eliminating race identification terms and reports of incidents with a racial connotation. This occurred apparently because of what Kahn found on the Herald Tribune in 1952-53: they were "made nervous by race." Thus, selectively picking facts, the papers produced unconscious, biased articles, which is not surprising in the 1940s considering the status of blacks at the time.

Meanwhile, the Daily News changed its coverage of Robinson only gradually as the season progressed. Thus, its readers got a more accurate picture of Robinson's first year in the major leagues even though the paper's coverage was just as subconsciously biased in some ways as that of the other two newspapers.

There are a number of possible explanations for the undisguised enthusiasm for Robinson on each newspaper at the beginning of the 1947 season.

For the past decade, talented blacks had been receiving more and more recognition. Not only was George Washington Carver greatly admired and praised at the time of his death (1943), but heavyweight champion Joe Louis and Olympic

star Jesse Owens were sports heroes while Marian Anderson, Roland Hayes and Leontyne Price were noted for their "extraordinary musical talent."<sup>26</sup>

World War II helped to stress the inequities of racism.

The struggle, first against fascism, then against communism, quickened the conscience of many whites; the inconsistency of waging war against totalitarian government abroad while denying racial equality at home was obvious. Moreover, the injustice of demanding from Negroes the full obligation of citizenship in the way of military service while denying them many of its privileges became clear to more and more Americans.<sup>27</sup>

Then, a month before the 1947 major league season began, the Hutchins Commission issues its famed report, A Free and Responsible Press. Among other things, it called upon the press to present a "representative picture of constituent groups in society" and to avoid stereotyping.<sup>28</sup> The report was heavily reported (for example, the Times carried nine stories and editorials on it in March and April)<sup>29</sup> and sportswriters presumably would have been aware of its criticisms.

They also would have been aware--and quite possibly impressed--by Robinson's personality. Rickey had told Robinson what he expected of him (to achieve acceptance from the press, public and other players) in a three-hour interview on Aug. 29, 1945:

Rickey felt very strongly that impetuosity or aggressiveness could damage a Negro's chances. . . . Rickey insisted on a "cloak of humility" as part of his strategy to have Robinson accepted by the baseball world. Robinson asked if he wanted a ballplayer afraid to fight back, to which Rickey replied, "I want a ballplayer with guts enough not to fight back! You've got to do this job with base hits and stolen bases and fielding ground balls, Jackie. Nothing else!"<sup>30</sup>

And finally, there was the matter of winning. For example, one writer recalls that when the Dodgers signed Robinson, his father said: "Who cares if he's purple if he can knock in some runs?"<sup>31</sup> Sportswriters on the major New York newspapers shared this attitude. Arthur Daley wrote in the Times:

A veteran Dodger said of him, "Having Jackie on the team is still a little strange, just like anything else that's new. We just don't know how to act with him. But he'll be accepted in time. You can be sure of that. Other sports have had Negroes. Why not baseball? I'm for him, if he can win games. That's the only test I ask." And that seems to be the general opinion.<sup>32</sup>

On the Herald Tribune, Red Smith also attacked prejudice.

Intolerance is an ugly word, unsightly in any company and particularly so on the sports pages where, happily, it does not often appear. Without laboring the point, it is fair to say that on most playing fields a man is gauged by what he can do and neither race nor creed nor color nor previous condition of servitude is a consideration. Which is one reason why American sports are as eloquent an expression as we have of the spirit of America.<sup>33</sup>

Jimmy Powers of the Daily News was equally blunt:

As we said before, and we repeat it here, everything El Cheapo Rickey does is not wrong. He deserves a load of credit for his courage in bringing the first Negro into the big leagues. We wish Robinson the best of luck.<sup>34</sup>

Against this backdrop, widespread conscious bias against Robinson would be surprising. The only possible examples found in this study were the five uses of the word "Negro" in the cutlines of pictures that clearly showed Robinson's skin color. Since 191-of-196 cutlines (97 percent) examined in the three newspapers did not contain the word "Negro," however, it is probable that each paper had a policy of not pointing out a person's race in cutlines, at least in Robinson's case, and the five uses were inadvertent.

Not so conscious apparently was the casual manner in which each newspaper used race identification terms. The survey shows that none of the papers differentiated between using "Negro" as a noun or an adjective--but Robinson did, although he did not speak out until the mid-1960s.

Dodger writers gave generous space to my play, and were scrupulously fair. However, they fell into a habit of calling me "The Dodgers' Negro star" in their accounts of games. This was like calling Carl Furillo "Italian" or Gene Hermanski "Polish." Several years were to pass before copy editors blue-penciled Negro into limbo. Negro in newspaper stories should be used only as a means of identification, like "blue-eyed" or "red-haired."<sup>35</sup>

Another form of subconscious bias is deliberately not printing all of the facts. Instead of sifting through the relevant information and selecting the most newsworthy material, reporters omit certain facts from a story simply because of the subject matter, thus distorting the truth.

The Times and Herald Tribune were highly discriminatory when dealing with Robinson's harassment by opposing players during games. The 41 stories surveyed in the Herald Tribune never mentioned any harassment and the Times only noted it once in 46 stories:

A photographer or a group of them brought Jackie Robinson over to the Phils' dugout and posed him shaking hands with manager Ben Chapman. The Philly manager, it will be recalled, had been charged with "riding" the Negro star unduly during the Philly-Dodger series in Brooklyn.<sup>36</sup>

The Daily News' record was only slightly better. In 57 stories, it mentioned harassment by opponents three times: twice it referred to Philadelphia's "riding" of Robinson<sup>37</sup> and once it noted that opposing pitchers were throwing at him.<sup>38</sup> The latter reference is interesting because it wasn't an observation by a sportswriter. Instead, it was a quote from former pitcher Freddy Fitzsimmons.

Don't get too excited over the long-haired keyhole peepers and professional bleeding hearts who are moaning over Robinson. Jackie himself isn't complaining. He is not the only rookie to be thrown at. Why discriminate against him? He doesn't want it that way. He's O.K.

Not only was the harassment rarely mentioned, although it has been well documented and most of the writers who covered the Dodgers regularly must have known what was happening, but its viciousness was understated by the papers. Harold Parrot, traveling secretary for the Dodgers, recalls the Philadelphia game.

. . . At no time in my life have I ever heard racial venom and dugout filth to match the abuse that Ben (Chapman) sprayed on Robinson that night. Chapman mentioned everything from thick lips to the supposedly extra-thick Negro skull, which he said restricted brain growth to almost animal level compared to white folk. He listed the repulsive sores and diseases he said Robbie's teammates would become infected with if they touched the towels or the combs he used. He charged Jackie outright with breaking up his own Brooklyn team. The Dodger players had told him privately, he said, that they wished the

black man would go back into the South where he belonged, picking cotton, swabbing out latrines, or worse.<sup>39</sup>

Others have noted that the harassment included "an extra hard tag, deliberate spikings, . . . a stray pitch aimed at . . . (Robinson's) head."<sup>40</sup>

This type of bias--deliberately not printing all of the relevant facts--became more pronounced on the Times and Herald Tribune after May 10. On that date, the Times, in a separate story from its game coverage, revealed that Robinson had received a number of anonymous threatening letters which had been turned over to the police. The article also discussed the proposed player strike by the St. Louis Cardinals to protest Robinson's playing in the major leagues.<sup>41</sup> And both Herald Tribune columnists wrote lengthy pieces on the Cardinals and racism.<sup>42</sup>

These revelations apparently had a great effect on editors at both newspapers. Although no evidence has been found to show that there was a formal policy decision at either paper, coverage of Robinson definitely changed after May 10. This suggests that the editors felt they were adding to racial problems, even though they were reporting only the facts, and therefore the responsible course was to delete anything that might inflame the situation further.

For whatever reason, their coverage shifted abruptly. Instead of covering Robinson extensively as a racial barrier breaker, they treated him as any other player, even leaving him out of game stories increasingly in the last half of the season when his performance wasn't notable. Subconsciously, this was biased reporting. Readers were given a rosy, sterile picture rather than the complete facts. While it might have helped cool racial tensions, this was a step backward in objective reporting.

On May 10, the Daily News also carried a story on the threatening letters, the proposed player strike and the "riding" Robinson received from the Phillies.<sup>43</sup> However, no evidence was found to suggest that the editors

felt the paper's coverage might contribute to racial problems. Instead, the paper's reporting on Robinson changed gradually until he was covered no differently than a white star by the end of the season.

There is ample evidence supporting this conclusion:

1. After May 10, the Daily News identified Robinson as a black  $4\frac{1}{2}$  times as often as the Herald Tribune and more than twice as often as the Times. However, the paper's use of the terms still declined significantly, from 17 terms in 26 stories through May 10 to nine in 31 stories after that date.

2. The Daily News not only reported far more events with racial connotations than the other two newspapers (almost three times as many as the Herald Tribune and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  times more than the Times), but it spread them out more over the season. Only a tenth of the Herald Tribune's incidents and a fourth of the Times' incidents appeared after May 10, compared to almost a third in the Daily News.<sup>44</sup>

3. The only paper to use pictures of Robinson throughout the season was the Daily News. While the Times and Herald Tribune only had pictures of him in April and September, the Daily News showed him in seven photographs (18 percent of the pictures in which he appeared) in May through August.

"It has long been established that the baseball writers of the 30s and 40s wrote fantasies about the great American pastime (baseball) and were generally apathetic about baseball's color," William G. Kelley wrote in 1976.<sup>45</sup> That unsupported assertion is largely disproven by the survey of the three New York newspapers. Instead of large, deliberate distortions of fact, as Kelley suggests, the writers basically did a good job of covering Robinson although there were numerous instances of subtle bias on all three papers.

This study suggests strongly the need for more research on sports-writing and particularly its coverage of minorities. For example, were there similarities between the way Robinson was covered by the New York papers

in 1947 and the coverage of Larry Doby, the first black in the American League (also in 1947), by the Cleveland papers? And later, when the San Francisco Giants had a Japanese pitcher, how was he treated by newspapers? But perhaps most importantly, how were blacks covered by the city side of the Times, Herald Tribune and Daily News during the same period that the sportswriters were covering Robinson in 1947?

It's quite possible that further studies will show that sportswriters, because of their love of athletic ability and accomplishments, have led the way on most newspapers in bringing about objective coverage of blacks.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Thomas E. Foreman, "Discrimination Against the Negro in American Athletics" (unpublished Master's thesis, Fresno State College, 1957), p. 8. In the early 1880s, two blacks, Moses Walker and his brother, Welday Walker, both played for Toledo in the American Association, which had major league status.

<sup>2</sup>Louis Effrat, "Dodgers Purchase Robinson, First Negro in Modern Major League Baseball," New York Times, April 11, 1947, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup>David Q. Voigt, America Through Baseball (Chicago: Nelson-Lall, 1976,) p. 117.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 116-117.

<sup>5</sup>Wally Jones and Jim Washington, Black Champions Challenge American Sports (New York: David McKay Co., 1972), p. 97.

<sup>6</sup>Jackie Robinson, Jackie Robinson: My Own Story, as told to Wendell Smith (New York: Greenberg, 1948), p. 62.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>8</sup>Leonard Broom and Philip Selznick, Sociology (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 530.

<sup>9</sup>Robinson, op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>11</sup>Damon Rice, Seasons Past (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1976), p. 327.

<sup>12</sup>Roger Kahn, The Boys of Summer, Signet (New York: New American Library, 1973), p. 135.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 168-169.

<sup>14</sup>Richard L. Tobin (Director of Public Affairs at the New York Herald Tribune in 1947), private interview at Indiana University, Bloomington, Ind., November, 1979.

<sup>15</sup>Studying bias and/or prejudice by looking at whether race identifying terms are used as nouns or adjectives was suggested by Roy E. Carter, Jr. in "Segregation and the News: A Regional Content Study," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 34 (Spring, 1957), pp. 7-8. However, his findings are not applicable to this study since he measured how many times identifying terms were used as nouns or adjectives by two groups with pre-determined feelings about blacks: pro-integration and pro-segregation sources.

<sup>16</sup>John Drebing, "Shea or Reynolds Slated to Open Series for Yanks," New York Times, Sept. 28, 1947, sec. 5, pp. 1 and 3.

<sup>17</sup>Roscoe McGowen, "Giants Lose, Drop to First-Place Tie With Cubs; Yanks Divide; Dodgers Win," New York Times, June 5, 1947, p. 33.

<sup>18</sup> Bob Cooke, "Giants Lose to Dodgers, 7-3, and Drop Out of Lead; Senators Subdue Yankees, 5-4," New York Herald Tribune, May 28, 1947, p. 28.

<sup>19</sup> Jim McCulley, "51,780 See Dodgers Rip Giants, 7-3, Reese HR, Branca Fans 10," New York Daily News, May 28, 1947, p. 63.

<sup>20</sup> Dick Young, "Flock Tops Giants, 6-1; Robby Has His 'Day,'" New York Daily News, Sept. 24, 1947, p. C17.

<sup>21</sup> Louis Effrat, "Yanks, Athletics in Stadium Opener Today; Dodgers Engage Braves," New York Times, April 15, 1947, p. 31; "Robinson Reveals Written Threats," New York Times, May 10, 1947, p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> New York Times, April 11, 1947, p. 20; New York Herald Tribune, April 11, 1947, p. 26.

<sup>23</sup> New York Daily News, April 11, 1947, back cover.

<sup>24</sup> New York Herald Tribune, April 12, 1947, p. 15.

<sup>25</sup> New York Herald Tribune, Sept. 28, 1947, sec. III, p.1.

<sup>26</sup> Oscar T. Barck, Jr., and Nelson M. Blake, Since 1900 (New York: MacMillan Co., 1967), p. 749.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 751.

<sup>28</sup> Margaret A. Blanchard, "The Hutchins Commission, the Press and the Responsibility Concept," Journalism Monographs, No. 49 (May, 1977), p. 25.

<sup>29</sup> New York Times, New York Times Index for the Published News of 1947 (New York: New York Times Co., 1948), p. 1,534.

<sup>30</sup> Broom and Selznick, op. cit., p. 530.

<sup>31</sup> Rice, op. cit., p. 327.

<sup>32</sup> Arthur Daley, "Sports of the Times," New York Times, April 16, 1947, p. 32.

<sup>33</sup> Red Smith, "Views of Sports," New York Herald Tribune, May 10, 1947, p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> Jimmy Powers, "The Powerhouse," New York Daily News, April 11, 1947, p. C17.

<sup>35</sup> Jackie Robinson, Baseball Has Done It (New York: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1964), p. 53.

<sup>36</sup> Roscoe McGowen, "Dodgers Beaten by Phils in 11-Inning Night Contest; Braves Defeat Giants," New York Times, May 10, 1947, p. 16.

<sup>37</sup> Hy Turkin, "Police Investigate Poison Pen Threats to Jackie Robinson," New York Daily News, May 10, 1947, p. 25. "Chapman Praises Jackie Robinson," New York Daily News, May 10, 1947, p. C37.

<sup>38</sup> Jimmy Powers, "The Powerhouse," New York Daily News, Sept. 7, 1947, p. C19.

<sup>39</sup>Harold Parrot, The Lords of Baseball (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1976), p. 194.

<sup>40</sup>Broom and Selznick, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>41</sup>"Robinson Reveals Written Threats," New York Times, May 10, 1947, p. 16.

<sup>42</sup>Smith, op. cit., p. 14. Stanley Woodward, "Views of Baseball," New York Herald Tribune, May 10, 1947, p. 15.

<sup>43</sup>Turkin, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>44</sup>It is interesting to note that the Daily News was the only one of the three newspapers to mention racial barriers that Robinson faced off the field. On May 14, Dick Young (in "Reds: 7 Runs on 5 Hits; Flock: 5 Runs on 13" on pages 63 and 65) wrote: "Robinson...is an acceptable transient at the Netherlands-Plaza (a Cincinnati hotel). Considering that this is a borderline city, the hotel deserves plenty of credit for setting a fine example.").

<sup>45</sup>William G. Kelley, "Jackie Robinson and the Press," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 53 (Spring, 1976), p. 138.

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